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General Assembly
Sixty-sixth session

Official Records

9th plenary meeting
Tuesday, 20 September 2011, 5.45 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Al-Nasser ..... (Qatar)

The meeting was called to order at 6 p.m.

High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the theme "Addressing desertification, land degradation and drought in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication"

Agenda item 19 (*continued*)

Sustainable development

(e) Implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa

Statement by the President

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The world's leaders have been meeting for the first time in a high-level meeting of the General Assembly to address desertification, land degradation and drought. Leaders have decided that the three pillars of development would be jeopardized unless desertification, land degradation and drought are addressed.

Leaders of the world have today undertaken an important, intensive debate on affected ecosystems and livelihoods of populations in order to achieve sustainable development and combat poverty. It is my honour to summarize the highlights of today's constructive discussions. I shall then take it over to the tenth session of the Conference of Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, to be held next month in Changwon, Republic of Korea. I shall also refer it to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, to be hosted by the city of Rio de Janeiro in 2012.

Member States have stressed that desertification and land degradation are some of the issues that affect various ecosystems in different ways. The main effect is felt by the poorest, particularly in arid lands where more than one third of the world's people live, about 1 billion of whom have achieved the lowest measures of human development.

In this context, leaders have decided that if arid lands are to become lands of common prosperity, the solution lies in giving soil improvement the highest priority and guaranteeing technological and sustainable land management in relevant policies and practices. Leaders stressed the need to protect lands through sustainable management in order to combat desertification, land degradation and drought, in addition to adapting to climate change in a way that preserves the livelihoods of those most affected. Leaders also emphasized the need for the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification to become an effective means to achieve food security.

The leaders further stressed that it is possible to find sustainable solutions for overcoming the obstacles that stand in the way of attaining the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). They underlined the need to work on the following priorities. They called for strengthening the scientific base of knowledge in order to study desertification, drought and land degradation. Many leaders and one geographic group suggested the creation of a consultative group devoted to studying desertification, land degradation and drought that

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would provide consensual consultative opinions and expertise on the scientific parameters of the issue. The creation of such a group would also contribute to assisting world leaders in making appropriate decisions on desertification, land degradation, combating drought and breaking the link between desertification and famine.

Many leaders stressed that at a time when indications show that land degradation in all ecosystems is increasing, efforts must not be confined to addressing the phenomenon in Arab lands alone. The debate showed that the spread of this phenomenon to other ecosystems would lead to many and varied challenges related to the very source of this phenomenon, including food security, poverty, forced migration, the negative effects of climate change, deforestation, the loss of ecological diversity, political instability and, consequently, to the eruption of conflicts. In addition, there would be failure to achieve the MDGs and sustainable development.

An appeal was made to promote implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification as a world framework for policies and monitoring to deal with the challenges of soil and land degradation.

Many leaders also stressed that the time has come to reach a world free from the problems and challenges of land degradation. This would help in setting sustainable development goals directly linked to measuring land degradation. They also stressed the need for improving financing for the strategy to deal with land degradation and the eradication of poverty. And they stressed the need to combat land degradation as a high-return investment, as the cost of land degradation in the future would be much higher than if we were to take up such challenges forthwith.

A number of delegations also referred to the importance of investing in sustainable land management, which must become a fundamental component in transformation towards a green economy within the framework of sustainable development and the eradication of poverty.

As we look forward to the tenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, world leaders have committed themselves to immediate measures to ensure that the future of humankind does not fall hostage to our current disregard for the non-sustainable use of land.

Before I close the meeting, I should like to deliver a report on the High-level Meeting on the theme "Addressing desertification, land degradation and drought in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication".

Members have just completed an intensive day of discussions on an urgent issue. I would like to thank participants for their constructive and substantive interactive debate, undertaken in a spirit of cooperation and true commitment to protecting planet Earth. I would also like to express my gratitude to the co-facilitators of today's round tables for their efforts.

I should like to ask participants to consider an alarming fact, namely, that hunger kills more people every year than AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis combined. Much of the hunger in our world is caused by interlinked issues, including desertification, land degradation, drought and climate change. Desertification is therefore not only killing people, but killing our development and our future.

As is so often the case, it is the world's poorest populations who are the most vulnerable, as we are witnessing in the current famine gripping the Horn of Africa. Let me reiterate my call for urgent action by the General Assembly to protect these populations. In the face of such adversity, we must act on what we already know, that is, that prevention is the most effective way to cope with drought.

Efforts to reduce pressures on arid land and combat desertification need to go hand in hand with efforts to eradicate poverty, thereby contributing to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

We must also support every effort aimed at disaster-risk prevention and strengthen disaster-management capacities at all levels, including information and early-warning systems. This year, with a number of important global conferences to be held on the issue of sustainable development, we have an opportunity to ensure a higher priority for desertification, land degradation and drought, not only as an environmental concern but as an integral component of sustainable development.

I urge all members to participate actively and to ensure a successful outcome based on consensus. We have before us a grave and growing threat to development and to Earth's natural resources. It is up to all of us to ensure the necessary political will and international solidarity to combat desertification. I count on members' active and full support.

The High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the theme "Addressing Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought in the Context of Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication" is now concluded.

The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of sub-item (e) of agenda item 19.

The meeting was adjourned at 6.10 p.m.